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ABSTRACT

The publication is designed to assist professionals responsible for conducting triennial evaluations of handicapped students in New York. The triennial evaluation is intended to provide information on the students' needs and continuing eligibility for special education. The guidelines are intended to provide a conceptual framework for triennial evaluation. Organization factors are noted, including factors determining a student's present program/placement in special education. Guidelines for conducting the assessment touch upon such aspects as issues in limited English proficiency, diploma requirements, and vocational assessments. Results of the triennial evaluation are seen to answer critical questions about the student's current educational needs, continued eligibility or mainstream placement, and material/method adaptations. (CL)

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THE TRIENNIAL EVALUATION OF STUDENTS WITH HANDICAPPING CONDITIONS

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TO: District Superintendents
Superintendents of Public and Nonpublic Schools
Directors of Special Education
Directors of Pupil Personnel Services
School Psychologists
Chairpersons, Committee on the Handicapped

FROM: Maria Ramirez, Assistant Commissioner for General Education
Lawrence C. Gloeckler, Assistant Comissioner, Office for Education of Children with Handicapping Conditions

SUBJECT: *The Triennial Evaluation of Students with Handicapping Conditions*

The Triennial Evaluation of Students with Handicapping Conditions is a new publication designed to assist professionals responsible for conducting triennial evaluations.

A reexamination must, at least every three years, be administered to students with handicapping conditions. It is intended to provide information on the students' needs and continuing eligibility for special education. This booklet presents information to consider when arranging and conducting the triennial evaluation.

Additional copies are available from:

New York State Education Department
Office for Education of Children with
Handicapping Conditions
Division of Program Development
Room 1071 Education Building
Albany, NY 12234
Attn: Triennial Evaluation of Students with Handicapping Conditions

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FOREWORD

These guidelines are intended to provide a conceptual framework within which to assess the appropriateness of any particular triennial evaluation. They are intended to provide a basis for planning a triennial without restricting the flexibility and use of professional judgment which characterize such evaluations. While a reexamination of each student by a physician, school psychologist and other qualified, appropriate professionals is required, it is not intended that there be a standardized triennial assessment battery. It is understood that triennial evaluations will vary in complexity depending upon individual circumstances. It should be noted, therefore, that the time needed to complete an adequate triennial evaluation cannot be arbitrarily defined for all children, it will vary considerably from one student to the next depending upon the information needed.

This publication is the result of the collaborative efforts of ten professionals interacting with their colleagues from public school and university settings. Claire Barabash, Judith Mearig, Yancy Padget, Anne Pess, Vivian Sarasohn, Gil Trachtman, Terry Tyler, Melvin Schwager and their representative school districts provided their generous service to the project. The staff of the Office for Education of Children with Handicapping Conditions, and Esther Zinoman, Office of General Education, organized and edited this publication for the New York State Education Department.

INTRODUCTION

A child in a special education program should be expected to grow intellectually, socially and physically. The assumption is that many children may not need special education for the duration of their education. The annual review provides a periodic opportunity to consider if a handicapped student appears ready for a less restrictive placement. After three years of special education, time should be taken to thoroughly assess the effectiveness of the special education program which has been provided for the child and to determine whether he or she can move to a less restrictive environment.

According to Part 200.4(f)(4) (1984), of the Commissioner's Regulations, "A Committee on the Handicapped (COH) shall arrange for an appropriate reexamination of each pupil with a handicapping condition at least every three years by a physician, a school psychologist, and, to the extent required by the committee on the handicapped, by other qualified appropriate professionals. The triennial evaluation shall be sufficient to determine the pupil's individual needs and continuing eligibility for special education."

The evaluation shall be multidisciplinary, with the student's teachers, parents, and evaluating team playing an active part. The different perspectives of these individuals help provide a multifaceted, nondiscriminatory profile of the student needed to develop meaningful recommendations. Care should be taken to ensure that the evaluation team sees the student as a whole and unique individual, rather than as a "sum of parts." At least one member of the evaluating team must be sufficiently familiar with the student to interpret the information gathered about him or her at the COH meeting.

Formal standardized tests play a useful role in the evaluation process. However, the technical information accompanying individual and group tests has an impact on the significance of numerical scores, and must be understood. Further, the selection of tests must be individualized for each child. There is no predetermined battery of tests appropriate for all children. Whether using formal tests or other assessment procedures, the purpose of all evaluations — intellectual, educational, social/emotional and physical — is to identify specific strengths and weaknesses of the child and in the child's environment so that appropriate teaching methodologies and other needed interventions can be determined.

ORGANIZING AND CONDUCTING THE TRIENNIAL EVALUATION

The triennial evaluation is based on information from the initial individual evaluation, previous classification issues, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals for the past three years, the annual reviews, the student's current educational, social-emotional, physical and management needs as determined by standardized and nonstandardized assessment methods, the results of past parent conferences and a review of teaching methods and materials. Historical information is used to assess what new data will be needed to determine the individual student's current needs and continuing eligibility for special education. The current assessment will include data from the student, parent, teacher, members of the evaluation team, and other staff gathered in an interactive and collaborative manner.

Sections A and B of this publication indicate questions to be considered in determining the scope and content of the triennial evaluation. These questions focus on previous program considerations and educational progress during the last three years. Section C indicates what parental and professional information should be included in the triennial examination. The training, experience and judgment of professionals and the unique characteristics of a student determine the exact nature of the individual physical, psychological and educational reexaminations.

Section D reflects the special education questions which must be answered in order to determine a student's educational needs. The results should be a quality triennial examination which permits the Committee on the Handicapped to recommend strategies and education programs that truly meet the student's educational needs.

A. Factors determining a student's present program/placement in special education.

1. What diagnostic evidence led to the determination of the specific handicapping condition?
2. What were the student's developmental levels and needs in the following three areas?
   - Educational achievement and learning characteristics
   - Social-emotional development
   - Physical development
3. What was thought to be the student's individual learning style? Is this learning style consistent across all areas of instruction?
4. What was the student's dominant language?
5. What methods, materials, and teaching strategies were proposed?
6. What were the management needs? What was proposed to meet the student's management needs?
7. Was diploma status determined? Was a vocational assessment initiated? What recommendations were made?

Answers to questions concerning present program/placement provide an information base against which to determine the change and growth that has taken place during the student's last three years in special education.

B. Factors emerging from an analysis of the student's progress during the past three years in special education.

Annual reviews can provide data necessary to address many of these issues. Additional information can be obtained from Individualized Education Programs, report cards, and teacher's planning data.

1. What has been the student's progress in the following three areas?
   - Educational achievement and learning characteristics
   - Social-emotional development
   - Physical development
2. What were the IEP goals and to what extent were they achieved?
3. What accommodations were provided to a limited English proficient student and what was the result?
4. What methods, materials and teaching strategies were used during the last three years to accommodate a student's individual learning style and to what degree did each result in positive change?
5. What was provided to meet the student's management needs and has the need for intervention changed?
6. Has the junior high school or high school student been able to satisfy any diploma requirements? What courses have been successfully completed? What accommodation or support was necessary for the student to successfully complete these requirements?
7. Has the student participated in the statewide testing program? What were the results?
8. Has vocational assessment and/or programming occurred? What are the results?
9. What concerns have been raised by parents and teachers regarding the student's educational program over the past three years?

Answers to this set of questions indicate what effect the special education program has had on the student's educational progress in the last three years.

C. Conducting the current assessment.

With knowledge of the individual student's educational history and of the questions now needing answers, a current assessment is conducted so that program recommendations can be formulated.

1. The student's current special education teacher(s) will submit a report regarding the student's progress in meeting the IEP goals. The report should include results of any group and individual norm- and/or criterion- referenced achievement tests the special education teacher has administered. This report should answer the following questions: How is the student now functioning academically in relation to his or her current IEP goals and his or her peers? What teaching methodologies mesh best with the individual student's learning style?

2. If a student has previously been identified as limited English proficient, the report from the teacher should include a description of the student's current English language proficiency.

3. Each professional providing related services as specified in the student's IEP will evaluate the student's progress and current status and submit a report. Each evaluation and report will address the critical questions relevant to the particular related service being provided.

4. When the student's age indicates that vocational education is an appropriate concern, then this issue is addressed by conducting a vocational assessment or submitting a progress report from a vocational program in which the student is currently participating.

5. For junior high school or high school students fulfilling regular education course requirements, an assessment should be made of the courses needed in order to complete diploma requirements. The results of the annual guidance review should be considered.

6. Other persons who are significant to the student's educational program should provide information needed by the COH to assist in answering critical questions. (e.g., information from a tutor or mainstream subject area teacher who currently provides instruction to the student).

7. The perspective of parents, or person(s) acting in parental relation regarding the student, should be expressed directly to the COH when possible. This perspective should be reflected in a written summary. The summary should address the parents' view of the student within the family, the parents' evaluation of the student's adaptive behavior within the community and the parents' current educational concerns.

8. The report of the physical reexamination will address all critical questions that relate to the student's medical and/or physical needs. The physician's examination includes an evaluation of the general health of the student and indicates any health problems and/or conditions that may impede the student's progress in an education program. The physician's description of the student is generated against a background which includes the unique physical history of the student and age-appropriate child development parameters. The report may include recommendations for modification of the student's educational program.

9. The school psychologist will conduct a psychological reexamination of the student. This reexamination will seek to answer the critical questions previously formulated and to describe changes in a pupil's developmental, learning, behavioral and personality characteristics that will affect the future educational program. The student's special educational classification also plays a role in determining the areas that the psychologist now needs to evaluate. It is important to note that students with limited English proficiency must be evaluated in their dominant language; special arrangements may need to be made to make this possible.

In addressing the question of continuing eligibility for special education services, the assessment of cognitive development continues to be of significance. In the case of a triennial evaluation, there should always be previous relevant findings. When a student with previously documented average to above average intellectual functioning is being reevaluated, the school psychologist should make a professional judgment as to whether or not a formal test of intelligence will be administered and document the reason for that decision in the written report.

For students whose previous evaluations found a below average level of intellectual functioning, an individual measure of current intellectual functioning is an important aspect of determining continuing eligibility and handicapping condition and is expected to be conducted. In special cases, such as profoundly handicapped, multiply handicapped or autistic students, the school psychologist may determine that an alternative form of cognitive assessment is more appropriate and should be used. This determination is made on an individual basis and should be noted in the report.

In all cases, the school psychologist must consider and interpret the impact of the student's handicapping condition, the level of English proficiency, and the effects of the intervening educational program on the results of the evaluation in order to avoid an underestimation of the level of intellectual functioning.

D. Results of the triennial evaluation.

The results of a student's triennial evaluation will answer the critical questions:

1. What are the student's current educational needs and levels of social, emotional, and physical development?
2. Based on the student's current performance, are special education services still necessary or can the needs of this child now be met in a regular education program with supplementary general education services? In either case, is bilingual instruction required for a student with limited English proficiency?
3. If the recommendation to the COH is for continued eligibility, is a less restrictive environment recommended? If not, why not? What special or regular education program and/or services are recommended if the child is to receive special education? Are New York State approved alternative testing techniques needed? Can a determination be made as to whether a student's program is leading to a diploma or certificate? What evidence was used to make a determination regarding diploma status? Is a vocational program indicated? If so, what is the nature and extent of the vocational program?
4. If continued eligibility is to be recommended, what adaptations of instructional methods and materials are necessary? What educational strategies should be continued? What environmental modifications are indicated? What annual IEP goals are indicated?

With an in-depth evaluation by persons knowledgeable about and familiar with the individual student, the COH can make an informed decision about his or her next educational program. An accurate description of the student's current level of functioning and needs is also essential in determining an appropriate class placement in accordance with the concept of grouping by similarity of needs.

Suggestions for an individual assessment exist in a number of State Education Department publications. (*The Individual Psychological Examination, Nonbiased Psychoeducational Assessment: 1983,* and *Performance Levels and Individual Needs.*) Each of these describes good professional practices in the assessment process and should also serve to guide a triennial reexamination.

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